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IV. WHY I BELIEVE IN THE CHURCH

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When the Master was here he wrote no books, created no endowments, made no effort to change the form of government under which his country lived. He focused his efforts on building a church. He gathered a group of men whose minds were saturated with his ideas, whose hearts were steeped in his spirit, who were willing and competent to live after his method. Then he stood ready to stake the whole future of his cause upon what that church would do and be.

He believed in the church because he recognized the necessity for organized effort. You cannot sing an oratorio by yourself, I care not how splendid your voice may be—you must merge your own voice in the chorus. You cannot render the "Fifth Symphony" by yourself, I care not how well you may play upon some single instrument—you must blend your efforts with those of an entire orchestra. The modern miracles in manufacture and commerce were only possible because men learned to unite their forces and to act together. The same sound principle holds when we come to sing the Lord's song and to do the Lord's work. The end can only be achieved as men and women come together and are agreed and begin to act in concert.

We were at war recently with Germany. Suppose you had met some brave young fellow on the street in civilian dress, but carrying a gun, who

had informed you that he was on his way to France. But, "Where is your uniform?" you would have asked. "To what company do you belong, to what regiment?"

Then he might have told you in the vein of modern religious individualism, "Oh, I don't belong to any company. I don't wear a uniform. I don't make any professions as to being a soldier—I do not want to get my lines crossed. I want to stand out free and clear, living my own life in my own way. But I love my country and I am on my way to France to see if I cannot pick off a German or two on my own hook."

His folly would have made you laugh. No competent government on earth would have allowed him to go. Had he gone in any considerable numbers, his unorganized presence there in France would have been a hindrance to the work of the regular army. The man of sense fights with the troops.

We are now at war with the evil of the world, and it is no child's play. We see lined up against us not only huge masses of flesh and blood, headed wrong, but principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in high places. The very vagueness of the apostle's language indicated his sense of something mysterious, ominous, deadly. In the face of all that opposition to the divine purpose, the victory for righteousness cannot be won in haphazard fashion,

each man going his own gait, living by mood and impulse. The winning of that victory calls for discipline and concerted effort on the part of all those who believe that the principle of life which comes not to be ministered unto but to minister is Lord and that before it every knee should bow.

The Master believed in the church because he saw the value of fellowship in a common task. The Christian does not grow in isolation. He is a plant which the Heavenly Father has planted. He must have soil and atmosphere and climate suited to his complete growth. The soil where the Christian thrives, the atmosphere which he recognizes as his native air, and the climate which ministers to his unfolding are to be found at their best in the fellowship of the Christian church.

The longer and the more carefully I study those efforts which really count, those efforts which will add up large in the day when the books are opened, the more clearly do I recognize the importance of putting one's life into some institution which will continue when the man himself is gone. The influence of the free lance is short lived, it matters not how sharp a lance he may have been, or what a merry time he may have had for his brief hour upon the stage. The work which lasts is the work which blends and merges with the work of others in such a way as to result in something massive, corporate, enduring.

"I am doing a great work," a young man once said, "I cannot come down." He was laying bricks. But every brick went into a wall with thousands of other bricks. The wall surrounded a

city as its chief defense. The city was Jerusalem, where the Divine Honor dwelt more steadily and more conspicuously for centuries than at any other spot on earth. When we realize how that young man's work blended with the life of a race which for a thousand years held the right of the line in spiritual leadership, we feel that he did not overstate the significance of laying bricks in such a vast interest.

"I am doing a great work," some man says in a lonely little parish, where he is preaching sermons, calling upon the sick and troubled, making himself the friend of boys and girls. But in doing all this he is strengthening the line of that institution which reaches out into all the cities of the land and into all the lands of earth, making character wherever it goes. He has made stronger in its reach and grasp that worthy institution whose work will go forward when he has been gathered to his fathers.

There is stimulus and strength in that sense of participation in a worthy and far-reaching enterprise. The Christians of all lands are saying to that sordid materialism which concerns itself mainly with the animal comforts, "We believe in the Holy Ghost, the Giver of Life which is life indeed." They are saying to that narrow, petty individualism which is too blind to recognize the power of associated effort, "We believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints." They are saying to that whole method of life, which is content to crawl on a lower level when it might be walking with the sons and daughters of the Most High, "We believe in the forgiveness of sins, in the

resurrection of the dead, and in life everlasting." The Master knew what was in human life and needed not that any should tell him. And to that group of twelve young men who had been drawn to him by the wisdom of his utterance and the winsomeness of his character, he said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

The Master believed in the church because its supreme interest is character. It strives to have men wear ever more clearly the likeness of the Son of God. Its unceasing prayer is that we might be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man, that Christ might dwell in our hearts by faith, and that we might be rooted and grounded in good will.

You will all agree that the sorest need of the world at this hour is to be found in its lack of character. In the summer of 1914 we had brains enough, brawn enough, and wealth enough to have ushered in the millennium, if millenniums ever were ushered in by such means. The sad fact was that we did not have enough of character in the world at large, and what we ushered in was anything but the millennium.

Here in this broad land today we have resources enough, man-power enough, organizing and administrative ability enough to cover the country with peace and prosperity as the waters cover the sea. But we have not enough of the sense of social justice; we have not enough of consideration for the

interests of the other man; we have not an adequate supply of good will. In consequence, the situation which confronts us is full of menace. These sore problems can only be settled upon the basis of a higher type of personal character in the men who control the issue.

What an hour for the Christian church! It is the one institution on earth which is brave enough to stand up and accept the social ideal in its entirety. Many organizations have attacked the evil of the world piecemeal; they have undertaken some single item of human betterment. The church faces the infinite perfection of God, saying, "Thy Kingdom come! Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven!" And it will never cease its effort or limit the range of its prayer until that great consummation has been reached. What a glorious privilege to belong to an organization which has the moral courage to thus display its limitless aspiration on behalf of human life.

"I will build my Church." He was not building a stone structure with a spire on it—one cannot build a church out of stones or boards or bricks. With that material one can only build the building where the church may meet. The church itself is built out of men and women who have declared their loyalty to Christ and are undertaking to live in the same high mood. In them we have indeed a building of God, a house not made with hands, a habitation of the Spirit, eternal in the realm of moral values.